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DE RUEHKO #1665/01 1070057

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

P 170057Z APR 07

FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2694

INFO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

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RUEAWJA/USDOJ WASHDC PRIORITY

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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1) TOP HEADLINES

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TOTO to fix 180,000 toilets prone to catch fire

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Kanagawa Prefectural Police question MSDF officers, including lieutenant commander, to determine source of Aegis information leak; Apartment of petty officer 3rd class searched

Nihon Keizai:

Public organizations speeding up asset sales

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2) EDITORIALS

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- (1) High school baseball team to disband over scouting
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Mainichi:

- (1) Manifestos essential in second round of nationwide local elections
- (2) Child abuse law to be revised

Yomiuri:

- (1) China must stop being piracy paradise
- (2) New science museum to open today

Nihon Keizai:

- (1) Investors must be protected by solid rules
- (2) Russia needs freedom of assembly

Sankei:

- (1) North Korea: Set deadline for talks on sanctions
- (2) Solid guidelines necessary on posthumous use of frozen sperm

Tokyo Shimbun:

- (1) Part-time workers deserve better pension system
- (2) Take every preventive measure against collapse of buildings after quake

Akahata:

- (1) Japan must not be turned into terrible country

3) Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei)

Prime Minister's schedule, April 16

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)
April 17, 2007

08:48

Arrived at Kantei.

10:00

Met with Economic and Fiscal Policy Minister Ota and Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki. Later joined by Special Advisor Koike.

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11:00

Met with LDP Secretary General Nakagawa.

12:13

Had lunch with Kyoto University Prof. Nakanishi, Waseda University Prof. Shigemura, and Tsutomu Nishioka, vice chairman of the group to support the families of abduction victims.

13:27

Met with Italian Prime Minister Prodi. Held joint press conference with Prodi.

15:15

Met with Lower House member Taro Nakayama.

16:02

Viewed Leonardo da Vinci's painting at National Museum in Tokyo, along with Prodi and his wife.

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17:02

Attended LDP board meeting.

17:36

Attended at Kantei a monthly economic report-connected cabinet ministers' meeting.

19:08

Hosted dinner party for Prodi and his wife.

20:42

Returned to his official residence.

4) Poll: Cabinet support rate rebounds to 40%

ASAHI (Page 1) (Abridged)

April 17, 2007

The rate of public support for Prime Minister Abe and his cabinet was 40%, the Asahi Shimbun found from its latest nationwide public opinion survey. The nonsupport rate for the Abe cabinet was 38%. The support rate for the Abe cabinet rebounded from the 37% rating in the last survey taken March 31 and April 1. In addition, the Abe cabinet's nonsupport rate decreased from 43% in the last survey. The approval rating topped the disapproval rating for the first time in three months since this January's survey.

In the breakdown of public support for political parties, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party stood at 31%, with the leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) at 14%. The two parties' respective popularity ratings leveled off from the last survey. The proportion of those who have no particular party to support decreased from 50% to 46%.

5) Upper House starts debate on national referendum bill; Focus on minimum voter turnout; Committee fails to hold session due to opposition camp's resistance

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)

April 17, 2007

The House of Councillors yesterday started in its plenary session debating a bill setting procedures for a national referendum to amend the Constitution. The opposition bloc criticized the ruling coalition-proposed bill for: (1) failing to stipulate whether to set a minimum voter turnout, (2) restriction on political activities by civil servants; and (3) a limit on TV advertisements. Although the Upper House Special Committee for Research on the Constitution had planned to begin deliberations, the panel put them off due to objections from the opposition camp against replies at the plenary session by Lower House member Okiharu Yasuoka, who presented the ruling coalition's bill.

Referring to the ruling bloc-proposed bill failing to include a minimum voter turnout system, Tadayoshi Ichida of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) and Masamichi Kondo of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) pointed out that the constitutional amendment bill would be adopted by 10 to 20% of approval.

"It is unclear what kind of political activities civil servants are prohibited," said Kondo. Ichida expressed concern about the bill that stipulates that TV advertisements would be allowed until two

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weeks before the voting day, saying, "A force that has ample funds will buy up advertising networks in order to develop a large-scale campaign for constitutional amendments."

At the Upper House plenary session, Yasuoka stated: "Based on the debate at the Lower House, I think the Upper House will carry out intensive debate on items that were not deliberated in the Lower House." The opposition camp, however, negatively reacted against Yasuoka's statement, saying, "He thinks lightly of the Upper House." Yasuoka then apologized in a meeting yesterday of the Upper House Steering Committee, but a debate at the special committee and discussion on a timetable has been delayed to today and later.

Taro Nakayama, the chairman of the Lower House Special Committee for Research on the Constitution, yesterday briefed Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on the reasons why he had taken a forced vote amid opposition by the main opposition party, Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan). There is the view that with Minshuto's opposition the chance for constitutional reform is slipping away. Abe, however, expressed his hopes for cooperation with Minshuto, telling reporters, "Political circles will change."

6) Kyodo poll: 57% support constitutional reform, down 4 points

TOKYO (Page 1) (Abridged)
April 17, 2007

Kyodo News conducted a telephone-based nationwide public opinion survey on April 14-15, in which respondents were asked if they supported amending the Constitution. In response, "yes" totaled 57.0%, with "no" reaching 34.5%. In a similar survey taken in April 2005, "yes" totaled 61.0%, with "no" accounting for 29.8%. In the survey this time, there was a decrease in the proportion of affirmative answers, though only slightly, and an increase in the proportion of negative answers.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is eager to revise the Constitution while he is in office. A national referendum bill that provides procedures for constitutional revision has now cleared the House of Representatives. In the midst of such specific moves for constitutional revision, more people are apparently thinking it is now necessary to debate the issue in a cautious manner.

Respondents were also asked if they thought it would be necessary to amend Constitution Article 9, which stipulates Japan's war renunciation and its maintenance of no war potential. In response, 44.5% answered "no," with 26.0% saying "yes." As seen from these figures, negative answers markedly outnumbered affirmative ones.

The rate of public support for the Abe cabinet was 44.2%, up 4.3 percentage points from the last survey taken in March. The Abe cabinet's support rate, which tended to decline since October last year, rebounded for the first time. The nonsupport rate for the Abe cabinet was 38.3%, down 3.9 points.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Abe has made up his mind to change the government's interpretation, in which the government takes the position that the Constitution prohibits Japan from exercising the right to collective self-defense. Asked about the advisability of reinterpreting the Constitution, 54.6% preferred to uphold the government's current constitutional interpretation as is. Among other answers, 18.3% answered that the government should change its

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way of reading the Constitution so that Japan can participate in collective self-defense, with 18.7% insisting that the Constitution should be revised so that Japan can participate in collective self-defense. As seen from these figures, anti-revision answers outnumbered the total proportion of pro-revision answers.

In the Diet, the House of Councillors yesterday entered into deliberations on the national referendum bill sent from the House of Representatives. Asked about this legislation, 55.6% answered that there was no need for the Diet to pass the bill during its current session, with only 19.9% saying it should be enacted into law at an early date.

Polling methodology: The survey was conducted March 14-15 by Kyodo News Service on a computer-aided random digit dialing (RDD) basis. Among randomly generated telephone numbers, those actually for household use with one or more eligible voters totaled 1,474. Answers were obtained from 1,027 persons.

7) Prime Minister Abe announces SDF will not participate in Afghanistan PRT

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
April 17, 2007

Prime Minister Abe yesterday referred to the question of whether Japan will take part in the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) operating after the collapse of the Taliban government in Afghanistan and made clear his intention not to have the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) participate, saying: "I have no intention to have the SDF join the PRT. While working together with NATO's PRT, I plan to implement cooperation worth 2 billion yen over the coming several years." Abe was replying at a joint press conference after talks with Italian Prime Minister Prodi.

Abe had until then implied that the SDF would participate in the PRT in a speech at a NATO's board of directors meeting in January and a press conference afterwards.

In the PRT, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) work in the area of reconstruction assistance, such as building schools, while troops protect them.

Initially, Abe was positive about the SDF's participation in the PRT. Following his positive stance, the government had launched discussions on whether to allow the SDF to take part in the PRT under a general law that newly stipulates comprehensive standards about overseas dispatch of the SDF. But there is the possibility of the SDF using armed force abroad, which is prohibited (by the Constitution), so many in the government were cautious about the dispatch of the SDF to the PRT, with one government official saying, "It may violate the Constitution." Given the current situation, the prime minister appears to have concluded that the dispatch of the SDF to the PRT is difficult.

8) MSDF holds first joint drills with US, India, with eye on China's arms buildup

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)
April 17, 2007

The Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) conducted its first joint TOKYO 00001665 006 OF 011

naval drills with the militaries of the United States and India in the Pacific Ocean off the Boso Peninsula in Chiba Prefecture yesterday. By strengthening ties with Australia and India, with the Japan-US alliance as the axis, Japan has stepped up efforts to apply pressure on China, which has boosted military spending.

Defense Vice Minister Takemasa Moriya emphatically said in a press conference yesterday: "The joint drills are aimed at improving the maritime skills of the MSDF and the Indian military. The drills are very significant in boosting the friendly relationship and promoting

defense exchange among Japan, the US and India."

In addition to communications training, such as radio contact and flag signaling, the three countries conducted training of naval ships navigating side by side, assuming such scenarios as defending the sea lanes connecting the Middle East and Asia, as well as preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction by North Korea.

Japan apparently is keeping China's recent military buildup in mind. A senior Defense Ministry official commented: "It is quite natural for Japan to try to apply pressure on China, which has frequently encroached into Japanese territory." Foreign Vice Minister Shotaro Yachi, however, stressed in a press conference yesterday: "The drills are aimed at boosting friendly relations and are not linked to China."

9) Investigators question MSDF officers, including lieutenant commander, about leaked Aegis information; Apartment of petty officer 3rd class searched

SANKEI (Top play) (Full)

April 17, 2007

Investigative authorities, including the Kanagawa Prefectural Police, have questioned about 10 Maritime Self-Defense Force officers, including the lieutenant commander who had compiled files containing information on the Aegis system, in connection with the removal of pivotal data on Aegis vessels by a 33-year-old petty officer 2nd class of MSDF Escort Flotilla 1 (Yokosuka City, Kanagawa Prefecture). Investigative authorities will conduct investigations to determine why and how the data including "special defense secrets" leaked out in order to establish a case against those

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officers on suspicion of violating the law on the protection of national security information under the Japan-US Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement.

It has become clear through investigation that the hard disk taken out by the seaman to his home contained files on essential information on the Aegis system that are classified as "special defense secrets." The files bore the name of the lieutenant commander belonging to a program development division responsible for maintaining and managing the system. This prompted investigative authorities to question the lieutenant commander and several other officers who had been assigned to the same program development division. Authorities have also begun questioning a number of other officers who had been assigned to the same destroyer, the Hatsuyuki, with the petty officer 2nd class in question.

Investigators also searched on April 13 the Yokosuka apartment of a 30-year-old petty officer 3rd class based at the destroyer Shirayuki of the Yokosuka District who is believed to have given the petty

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officer 2nd class the data files in question on suspicion of violating the security information protection law. As a result, the investigators confiscated a personal computer and hard disk from the apartment. It is the first time that the law on the protection of national security information has been invoked since it took effect in 1954.

The petty officer 3rd class told investigators that he had no recollection of exchanging files with the petty officer 2nd class. On the other hand, the petty officer 2nd class told investigators, "After I copied various files from the personal computer of the petty officer 3rd class, I found files containing information on the Aegis destroyers."

10) Japan, China, South Korea in wise men's conference proposes creating environment fund, disbursing 5% of foreign currency reserves to set up fund to stabilize Asian currencies

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 1) (Excerpts)

April 17, 2007

Experts in the economic, political, and academic areas from Japan, China, and South Korea met to discuss measures to promote trilateral cooperative relations. The two-day wise men's conference, sponsored by the Nihon Keizai Shimbun, the New China News Agency, and the JoongAng Ilbo, which wrapped up on April 16, put together a package of recommendations, including the creation of an environment fund designed for the three countries to assist environmental protection projects in Asia by issuing bonds in their respective currencies. To establish a fund aimed at stabilizing Asian currencies, the conference also proposed setting up a system under which 13 countries - Japan, China, South Korea, and the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) members - would disburse 5% of their foreign currency reserves each.

The second round of the conference, following the first one held in Seoul in February of last year, was joined by about 30 academics and business leaders, including former Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, Toyota Motor Corp. Chairman Fujio Chou, former South Korean Prime Minister Lee Hong-Koo, and the Chinese Haier Group vice president. Besides a plenary session, the conference was proceeded with three working sessions regarding "currencies, finances, and economic integration;" "environment and energy," and "culture and private-sector exchanges." Each working session worked out a report of recommendations.

In the session on finances and economic integration, the report included these measures: (1) Early establishment of an Asia currency unit (ACU) to calculate exchange rates in the region in a weighted average method; (2) building of mutual confidence to promote economic integration among Japan, China, and South Korea; and (3) holding of a trilateral summit regularly in order to accelerate negotiations on concluding a trilateral free trade agreement (FTA).

If the notion of ACU is translated into action, the ACU will be the Asian version of the European Currency Unit (ECU), the predecessor of the unified currency euro in Europe.

11) Poll: 80% see need for minimum turnout for constitutional referendum; Public opinion split over legislation during current Diet session

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ASAHI (Top play) (Full)
April 17, 2007

The Asahi Shimbun conducted a telephone-based nationwide public opinion survey on April 14-15, in which respondents were asked about the advisability of legislating a national referendum bill that provides procedures for amendments to the Constitution. A total of 79% answered "yes" when asked whether the voting rate should be above a certain level. "Yes" also accounted for 80% among those who support the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and its coalition partner, the New Komeito. The bill, after clearing the House of Representatives, was sent to the House of Councillors yesterday for deliberations. It is now certain to be enacted into law during the current Diet session. However, the minimum necessary turnout for constitutional revision is likely to become a point at issue in Diet discussions.

Public opinion was split over whether the national referendum bill should be enacted into law during the current Diet session, with 40% answering "yes" and 37% saying "no." In addition, "other answers" and "no answer" also totaled 23%.

Among those in their 20s and 30s, "yes" accounted for nearly 50%. Among those over the age of 40, however, "no" somewhat outnumbered "yes." Broken down into political party supporters, "yes" accounted for 55% among LDP supporters. Meanwhile, "no" totaled 60% among those who support the leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto).

The national referendum bill, currently under discussion in the Diet, does not stipulate the minimum necessary turnout, so the Constitution could be revised even if turnout was low. With this

explanation given in the survey, respondents were asked if they thought the turnout of voters should be above a certain level.

In response, "yes" accounted for a majority not only among male and female respondents but also in all age brackets. The figure reached 79% among those who support the Abe cabinet and 80% even among those who think the legislation should be enacted into law during the current Diet session. Broken down into political party supporters, "yes" accounted for 80% among LDP supporters, 79% among New Komeito supporters, and 86% among DPJ supporters.

"No" accounted for only 11% of all respondents.

12) Ruling camp's bullish with number of key bills entering deliberations: Emphasis on results of Upper House election

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Excerpts)
April 17, 2007

Now that the national referendum bill, on which Prime Minister Abe places importance, will likely obtain Diet approval during the current session, the ruling camp is increasingly bullish in its steering of the Diet. It has now begun shifting its target to early passage of bills amending the Juvenile Law and the United States Forces in Japan (USFJ) Realignment Special Measures Law. Diet deliberations on three bills related to education reform and a bill amending the Iraq Reconstruction Assistance Special Measures Law will also start in the Lower House. The ruling parties intend to focus on results with the Upper House election close at hand in July.

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Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Secretary General Hidenao Nakagawa during a party executive meeting yesterday urged unity to pass the key bills: "There is a mountain of key bills. I would like you to steadily proceed with deliberations for their early passage."

Prior to this meeting, Diet Policy Committee Chairman Toshihiro Nikai met with Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) Diet Policy Committee Chairman Yoshiaki Takagi and conveyed to him that the ruling parties are ready to hold intensive deliberations on the "politics and money" issue during the Lower House Budget Committee meeting on April 25. Takagi refrained from making a response. However, Nikai has judged that holding intensive deliberations as called for by the DPJ and other opposition parties will pave the way for passage of those bills.

The ruling parties are about to finalize a deliberation schedule for key bills. The Lower House Steering Committee during a directors meeting yesterday decided to hold a session for the explanation of the education-related bills and a question-and-answer session at the plenary session on the 17th. They want to see passage of the bills carrying an Abe stamp, to which the prime minister attaches importance along with the national referendum bill.

The ruling camp has decided not to insist on passage of the national referendum bill by May 3, Constitution Day, since it is now certain that it will obtain Diet approval, Nakagawa said. That is because they want to minimize a possible impact of its passage on other key bills. A certain LDP senior official revealed that the party intends to hold a session for explanations and interpellations on a bill amending the Social Insurance Agency on the 19th and the bill amending the Iraq Reconstruction Assistance Special Measures Law on the 24th.

Regarding bills related to Japan-US matters, the ruling camp expects the USFJ Realignment bill to obtain Diet approval in mid-May and the bill amending the Iraq Special Measures Law in early June. Foreign and defense affairs officials are relieved, because criticism of the US by such officials as Defense Minister Akio Kyuma had caused a stir. The prime minister will touch on the progress of both bills during a Japan-US summit meeting slated for later in the month.

13) New YKK trio of lawmakers moving to check Abe on Asia diplomacy

Yudai Nakazawa, Tatsuo Eto

Parliamentary groups dealing with diplomatic issues, including Asia diplomacy, are gaining steam, particularly in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). For instance, the so-called "new YKK trio" consisting of former LDP Vice President Taku Yamasaki and former LDP Secretaries General Koichi Kato and Makoto Koga, who are now

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estranged from Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, are moving to rally forces across the factions in the party with the aim of expanding anti-Abe forces. This move is taken as strategic preparation to form an alliance against Abe after the upcoming Upper House election. Meanwhile, lawmakers backing Abe's diplomacy are expected to launch their own parliamentary group in a move to oppose the anti-Abe force.

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Tug of war

Early this month during a Lower House plenary session, Yamasaki asked Kato about his plans for the Golden Week holidays from late April through early May.

Yamasaki: "How about traveling to a local area in addition to listening to a lecture at a study meeting?"

Kato: "That's a good idea. I know a good place to travel. It's near the China-Korea border."

Both agreed to do so and decided to make a five-day trip to China starting April 27. Their trip includes a visit to a town in Jilin Province near the border with North Korea. In contrast to Abe's "pressure" line toward North Korea, they emphasize the importance of dialogue. The official purpose of their China trip is to look into China-North Korea trade, but their real intention is apparently to forestall Abe and break a stalemate in Japan-North Korea relations.

Meanwhile, on March 26, a parliamentary association assisting the 2008 Beijing Olympics (composed of some 250 lawmakers) was launched. The chair of the association is Lower House Speaker Yohei Kono, who is seen as a representative of the doves. This group is a supraparty parliamentary group, and secretaries general of the LDP and the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) have been named deputy chairmen. On the membership list are "pro-China lawmakers," such as former Home Affairs Minister Takeshi Noda, former Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda, Yamasaki, Kato, Koga, former Finance Minister Sadakazu Tanigaki, and former Defense Agency Director-General Fukushiro Nukaga. Noda serves as secretary general of the association and Fukuda as vice chairman of the association.

All these parliamentary moves stem from three study meetings: the Research Council on Asia Diplomacy and Security Vision (with a membership of 40 or so lawmakers) established by Kato in cooperation with Yamasaki and others; the Asia Strategic Research Council, establishment of which Koga was deeply involved in; and the Asia and Africa Issues Research Council chaired by Lower House Speaker Kono. Affecting these three councils, the new YKK trio meet regularly and exchange views. "It's important to set the stage for (the foundation of the government) to broaden to involve middle-of-the-road lawmakers. If realized, a highly political decision can be made," Koga said. The moves of the faction led by Tanigaki, who is critical of Abe's diplomatic approach, are particularly drawing public attention. On April 3, Yamasaki and his faction's senior members and Tanigaki and his faction's senior members, including former Health Minister Jiro Kawasaki, met and agreed to deepen cooperation among the three factions, including the Koga faction.

14) Upper House by-elections: Ruling, opposition parties putting all efforts into Okinawa ahead of April 22

April 17, 2007

Less than one week is left until the April 22 Upper House by-elections. The ruling parties are desperately trying to solidify their support organizations in Okinawa. "We must not be defeated in two elections in order to avoid negative effects on the summer's House of Councillors election," said one senior member of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

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According to the results of a Yomiuri poll, in the Upper House by-election in Okinawa the candidate recommended by the ruling coalition and a candidate recommended by opposition parties are now fiercely competing against each other. In the by-election in Fukushima Prefecture, the candidate backed by Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) is ahead of the LDP-backed candidate.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told reporters last night: "I'm glad that I was able to speak about my policy and my idea of building a nation directly (to voters in Okinawa and Fukushima)." In a meeting earlier in the day, LDP Secretary General Hidenao Nakagawa gave a pep talk: "We have gained 70% of LDP supporters, but we need more support."

The opposition held the two Upper House seats in Okinawa and Fukushima before the by-elections. If the ruling coalition wins one seat, it will be able to decrease by one the number of seats it needs to win in the summer's Upper House race and maintain its majority in the Upper House.

The LDP thinks that it is uncertain that the present good mood will lead to gaining votes in Okinawa. The party, therefore, will call again on its lawmakers, support organizations, and corporations to work harder. In Fukushima as well, the LDP intends to call on prefectural assembly members and organizations for their support.

Minshuto President Ichiro Ozawa held a press conference last yesterday in Utsunomiya City. Referring to the campaign situation in Okinawa, he pointed out:

"In the gubernatorial election (last November), we were defeated in urban areas, including Naha City. Especially in Naha, this situation continues. Minshuto supporters do not know well about the candidate backed by Minshuto."

Ozawa stressed that his party would make efforts to gain support in urban areas.

SCHIEFFER